The Dead and the Gone

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Why I Read this Book

I decided to read The Dead and the Gone immediately after finishing the first book in the trilogy, Life as We Knew it, which talks about life after an asteroid collides with the moon, and knocks it out of orbit. The book was rather pugmatic and depressing towards the middle and throughout the end, but I couldn’t put it down. It was almost to the point where turning the page was a burden. I cried multiple times while reading this story, but I also learned many valuable lessons. I finished reading this book because I could not stand the idea of not finding out what the outcomes of the characters were.

Genre

The Dead and the Gone can be classified as both a scientific fiction and a young adult book. The two genres fit my book considerably well because the age groups that can obtain the most information and best relate to the story are pre- teens and teenagers, making it a young adult book. From another perspective, this book is exclusively scientific fiction because of the asteroid screwing up the lunar calendar and the moon’s schedule. Scientists don’t understand how to react to the sudden catastrophe, and everything is disorganized and unplanned. This specific accident, with an asteroid colliding with the moon, could not occur spontaneously in real life, but traumatic events just as detrimental as this occur each and every day. People all across the universe are facing poverty and suffer daily. Whether from a dearth or total lack of food, or poor quality atmospheric conditions, people still suffer. The affairs taking place in this book are related to real life circumstances, that’s what makes it scientific fiction. There’s a whole side to the story that explains the scientific aspect. Over a few months time, the moon blocks the sun entirely out of view, and the sunny temperature and bright skies are replaced with piercing cold weather and a consistent downfall of dingy looking snow.

Plot Summary

In this book, Alex Morales, a teenager, is left responsible for the livelihood of his two younger sisters and himself after an asteroid and the moon collide. He is not aware just how harmful the collision is to not just his hometown, but also the whole entire world. He prays to Jesus each and every night for his well being and his sibling’s safety. Each night he wishes his mom a speedy and safe trip home from assisting injured and sickly people at the hospital. He makes sure to also hope that his dad’s return from a relative’s funeral in Costa Rica comes soon. He imagines that both his parents are safe, but doesn’t know for sure. After a couple months, he starts loosing hope, but never gives up. Knowing that his outlook on life influences his sibling’s attitudes towards life and their overall demeanor. He understands that whether they eat each day, go to school, or visit the church is all up to him. He is not used to the authority he was indirectly given, but has to get accustomed to it very quickly. His whole life from the disaster and on is lived day-by-day. Each morning he wakes up knowing that if he conquers the day, he’s conquering life. He deals with his sister closest to him being sent away and only returning when she is more near to death than when she left home. He learns to positively interact with his younger sister. He watches his only true friend die, and watches millions of other people wilt away like dying flowers before his eyes.

Three Characters

Alex Morales would be considered the Protagonist in The Dead and the Gone because he is featured in every event mentioned within the novel. He is the sole provider for his family and even though everyone looks up to him and respects him, he never acts cocky. He always works diligently and tries to please everyone. Without knowing it, he gained respect from the most popular guy in high school, Chris Flynn, who he did not even know on a personal level. He found out he was acknowledged only when Chris approached him by saying, “I noticed you’re one of those guys everyone likes and respects…you’re in my prayers.” Alex was born into a highly religious, lower class family. He thought he had nothing and was embarrassed of his livelihood until the colossal disaster when he actually had nothing. He became impecunious and starved before long. Even ass he started loosing weight and becoming feeble and lanky he still made it of uttermost importance that his siblings eat something before he took any food. He cared about his family more than anything else in the world. He went through numerous obstacles attempting to find his mother. “I don’t really need to talk to her. I just need to make sure she is alright.” He said about her on the phone to a hospital worker. He kept himself alive so he could keep other people alive.

Another prominent character is named Kevin Daley. He is the same age as Alex, seventeen. They both attended Vincent De Paul, the boy’s school, together. Alex always though Kevin was awkward and weird until Chris, the most popular guy in the grade, told Kevin to become Alex’s buddy after he left. Kevin looked out for Alex and taught him all that was necessary for survival up until his unforeseen death. He taught Alex how to body shop and where to get food. They literally stripped dead bodies on the street of anything that could be of value and took it straight to Harvey, the traders, shop. Kevin always traded valuables for vodka for his mom, while Alex traded for any filling foods. He once told Alex, “And this isn’t something I’d like to get around, but I was a bed wetter. Mom never scolded me or made me feel like I was bad or it was my fault. So now, if I have effort to give her the one thing she wants, I’m going to do it.” Each week, Kevin volunteered to wait in line at the food truck with Alex and his sister to get one meager bag of food for the week. Kevin never took this food for himself even though he waited hours on end for it. He somehow stayed relatively healthy and as well fed as any civilian could be. His father worked as a trucker carrying goods to and from places. That meant, even in the worst of times he never lost his job or had to relocate. Therefore, Kevin was forced to remain living in the heart of New York City.

Lastly, Father Mulrooney, the main priest, is a very important figure in this story. Although you don’t hear about him as much as you do Briana or Julie, Alex’s sisters, he is always there. He remains faithful to Alex and always keeps his promises. He has more hope then Alex that his parents will return and continues to assist Alex in his many searches for them. He is always busy and exhausted, but tries hard never to show it. He remains loyal to all members of his church community and never reacts poorly of acts surprised when harsh information is told. He says to Alex, “I think it would take a saint to love God under the circumstances…Christ understands suffering. His heart is filled with love for you. He asks only that your suffering bring you closer in understanding to his. If God wanted a world filled with saints, He never would have created adolescence.” He speaks wisely, knows how to handle the facts and doesn’t try to candy-coat horrible information.

Major Themes and “Big Ideas”

A few themes present in this book are reverence, compassion, and courage. To me, the “Big Idea” is faith. Reverence and compassion are major themes in this novel because they appear quite often. Reverence is regarding someone with deep respect. Compassion is sympathetic concern for the misfortunes of others. Nothing positive in this novel occurs unless the Morales family works together. There are circumstances when Alex requests that his sisters do something to help him out, but they rebel. No good comes out of these occasions and they usually leave the family is even more turmoil than before. But, there are also episodes when, even in the worst of times, the family seems almost perfect. When they’re bonding over school, church, or common interests and everyone’s content. These are the times when favorable things occur in the novel. Although it’s cliché, Karma truly reveals itself in this book.

Courage is a huge factor in this novel because nobody in the Morales family, or in the whole community, could have survived without courage. During multiple parts in the book, the community just gave up. They stopped believing that there was a future for them. They lost all hope. People began starving to death and committing suicide in order to escape reality. The Morales family had such strong wills to live, nothing, other than what they couldn’t help, would or could break them.

Faith is of utmost importance in this novel because without ever revealing itself, it’s always there. Faith can be used in religious terms meaning, it’s the strong belief in god or in the doctrines of something. It is also having complete trust or confidence in someone. Both definitions are ideal for this novel. Yes, Alex believes in Jesus and God, multiple times a day he prays to them. He turns to these eternal beings when enduring hardship or suffering. There is nobody else he trusts and cherishes more than Jesus. His sister, Bri, agrees with him, but his youngest sibling, Julie, has faith in Alex. Although she never comes out and says it, there is nobody Julie would rather be stuck with than Alex. She supports him during everything and even though she acts with an ugly demeanor sometimes, she’s just testing her brother. The whole family has so much faith in life.

Major Conflict

Although it happened in the very beginning, the major conflict of this novel occurred when Alex’s parents disappeared after an asteroid hit the moon. His mom was supposedly at the hospital working when disaster struck New York and his dad was in Costa Rica for a relative’s funeral. What Alex, his two sisters, and his parents didn’t know was that there goodbyes to each other were goodbyes forever. Alex goes through many obstacles looking for hints or answers to what has become of his parents. He even reserved a seat on a bus driving to the Yankee Stadium, the place where dead, decomposing bodies were laid in single file lines for people to maneuver there way though in search of deceased family members. Alex finds nobody he knows there and wonders if that’s a good or a bad thing. He faces conflict with himself because he has no self-confidence. Keeping to himself the majority of the time, he is appalled when awkward Kevin approaches him at school. Kevin takes Alex under his wing and gives the Morales family anything he possibly can. Although Kevin gives Alex what he needs to survive, he knows just as little as Alex about where Alex’s parents might be, or if they are even alive. Multiple times, Alex has to lie to his siblings about having enough food in the house, batteries for the radio, and oil and gas. He’s aware that it is never ok to lie, but he finds it necessary under the circumstances. Although his job working at a pizza parlor helped with household bills, he never actually had someone else’s livelihood depend fully on himself. Not having his parents to comfort and support him during times as hard as these makes survival even more difficult. Alex knows he can’t loose hope. He has to make the best of the situation, not just for himself, but also for his parents. He understands that is what his parents would expect them to do. Even though they can’t physically be together, he works to impress them each and every day.

Symbolic Image



I chose to use a picture I took of my number from a past cross-country meet because it has a clandestine symbolic relationship. I connected my last cross-country meet to the novel. In a meet, after a mile or so, the runners begin to feel very tired and by the last 800 meters some runners even seem debilitated. Life in this book reminds me of a cross-country meet. You can’t skip to the finish and still expect to win. You have to conquer each meter and run your heart out. When you finish in the end, you’ll feel better about yourself because you know you did it and you gave it your all. In this book, Alex Morales hasn’t yet reached the finish. He’s still struggling, but he’s toward the end. What he doesn’t know, the end of the race is just a new beginning. By that I mean, when one finishes a race, it doesn’t mean they can stop training, it means they have to work even harder to improve what seems impossible. You take life as it comes, one hill per moment and one race at a time.

Vocab Words

One word I did not know in The Dead and the Gone was present in the sentence; “At least he’d have one rusty, cynicalweasel to hangout with.” I learned that cynical, as an adjective, means distrustful of human sincerity or integrity. I used context clues to come up with a part of speech and definition, but I used a dictionary to confirm my findings. Another unknown word to me was vocation. The sentence it’s used in reads, “Mami would be sure I had a vocation.” The part of speech is a noun. My definition of vocation would be dedication to ones employment or job. The word convoys in the sentence, “I know all about the convoys.” also struck me as new. It is used as a noun meaning to me a group of ships or vehicles traveling together with the protection of armed troops and other vehicles. One more word, quarantine, in the sentence, “If you hear the quarantine’s been lifted, come back in two weeks.” was also new to me. It is used a noun and my definition of it is a state or place of isolation in which mammals have been exposed to harmful or contagious diseases reside for periods of time. Lastly, the word regiment in the sentence, “Whatever information he could find about Carlos’s regiment.” was not in my vocabulary before reading this novel. It is used as a noun. To my understanding, it means a permanent unit of army divided into companies or squadrons led by a colonel.

Existing works with similar features

One book that has a few similar characteristics as The Dead and the Gone is Night, by Elie Wiesel. It gives us a detailed, intimate account of a young boy, Eliezer’s, experience during the Holocaust, teaching us about the daily suffering and starvation present in the concentration camps. What some do not realize though, is that Eliezer is actually Elie Wiesel as a young adult during the holocaust. It’s too emotionally exhausting and depressing to write a book about such a detrimental event using his own name, so he calls himself Eliezer. Although this un-idealistic way of life for millions may see like hell compared to Alex Morales’s story, victims suffering was alike the Morales’s in more than a few ways. Both Mr. Wiesel and Alex Morales relied on sources other than themselves for food, drinks, and medicine. They lived life on a day-to-day basis, thinking only of themselves and family and attempting not to think too much of the persons slowly dying around them, who had less even less than them. In both books, their faith in God keeps them alive. Although Alex is a devout Christian and Elie Wiesel is a religious Jew, they both put God above everyone and everything in life. Having someone to pray to along with someone who knows what’s best for each individual kept them working hard to please people of higher titles. Eliezer (Elie Wiesel) was forced to work for the Nazis in order to remain living, where as Alex Morales worked whatever job he could fine whenever one was available to supply for his family and impress Father Mulroony, the head of the church his family belongs to. Both kids strive hard to please everyone around them and do one thing many people in the past and present don’t do. They never give up.